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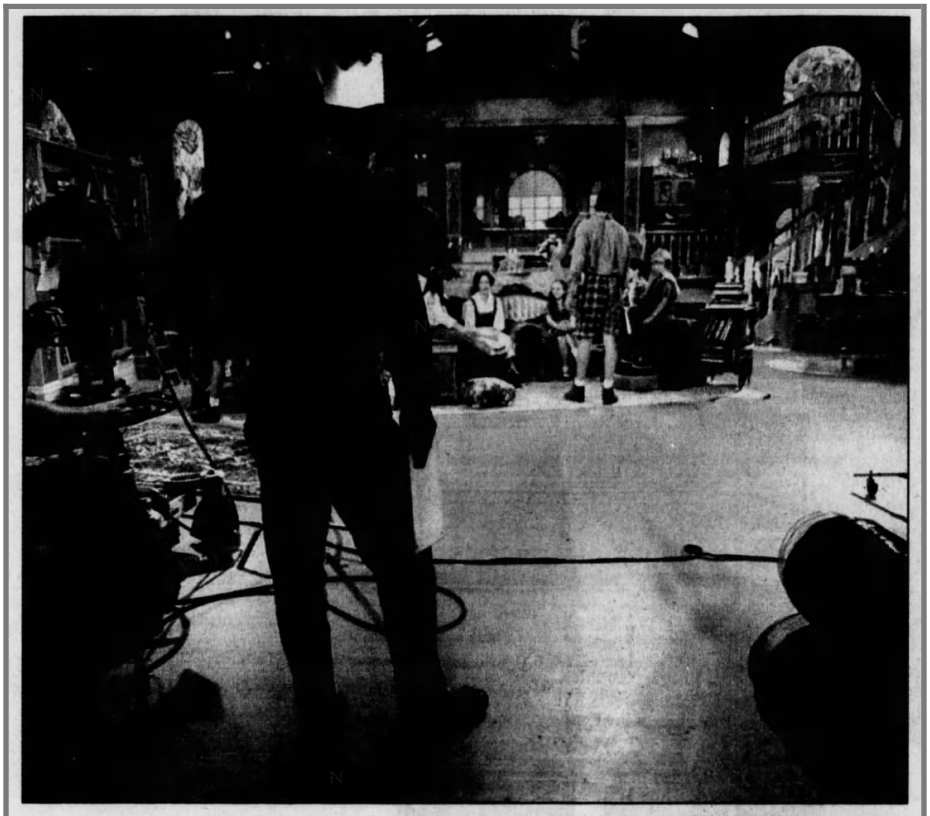


Photos by TYRONE TURNER / Los Angeles Times

Patrick Davidson is silhouetted against the set of the TV show "Disney's Sing Me a Story With Belle."

A Call to Art

Valley-Based TV Producer Tapped for NEA Grant Panel

By SYLVIA L. OLIANDE
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

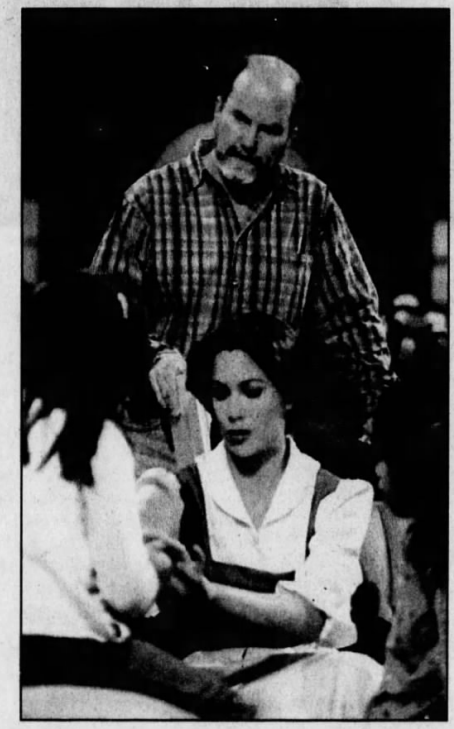
Patrick Davidson has spent much of his career dealing with fairy-tale heroes and princesses—uncontroversial figures in entertainment and the media.

But now the Chatsworth-based television producer has plunged into a world often marked by conflict and acrimony, where politics and art collide—namely, in the National Endowment for the Arts.

Davidson, 46, has been tapped to serve on the panel that reviews and approves applications for grants from the NEA—a favorite target of conservative politicians and critics who accuse the agency of using taxpayer money to fund immoral and indecent art.

The hard work for Davidson starts Monday when the Camarillo resident, who created a spinoff TV series from Disney's animated film "Beauty and the Beast," journeys to Washington to join fellow members of the National Council on the Arts in wading through 900

Please see DAVIDSON, B12



Davidson talks with cast members, including Lynsey McLeod, center, who plays Belle in the series.

LA Times article on "Sing Me A Story with Belle" executive producer Patrick Davidson - Part 1 (1996)

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DAVIDSON: TV Producer to Join NEA Grant Panel

Continued from B1

new NEA applications.

"It's going to be tough," he said. "Everything is worthwhile, but . . . at the end of the day, I'm going to assume there are going to be more applications than we have money to give."

Davidson was nominated to the council by the Clinton administration, which first came to know of his work in 1993 when he produced the "Salute the Youth" special at the Kennedy Center during the president's inauguration.

If there is a downside to the appointment, he said, it would be entering into a federal agency that was thrust into an unforgiving spotlight in the late 1980s and criticized for some of its funding decisions.

Davidson shies away from discussing those controversies further and from commenting on a recent decision by a federal appeals court to strike down a 1990 decency law, which directed the NEA to consider the public's "beliefs and values" before awarding grants.

But he will speak out against the practice of restricting awards based on political pressure or expediency.

"To make it a political issue is totally inappropriate," he said. "It should not even be bipartisan. It is truly a public trust and it should remain as such."

But, Davidson added, having met the people who work for the NEA and who sit on the board, he is less concerned about influence of politicians.

"This is a group of people and an entire organization trying to foster arts awareness and education in the United States," he said. "I can't understand why anyone wouldn't stand up and say, 'This is a good thing to do,' celebrating it instead of pitting one side against the other."

Sandy Crary, NEA chief of staff, said Davidson is a welcome addition to the 26-member panel.

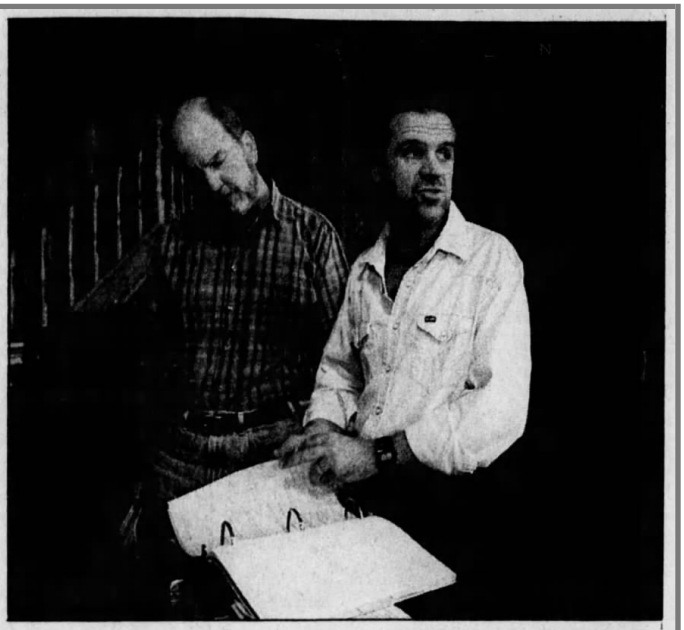
"He brings an experience in television production and media in general," Crary said. "We do not have a person in media, yet we fund a number of projects in the nonprofit media area. So he brings that expertise."

Davidson also hopes to bring a new perspective to the council, to use the recent national interest in children's television programming to advance the idea that arts are important in schools and to push the limits of what society views as art.

"I'd like to have them recognize the power of television in respect to the arts," he said. "People typically think of the arts as being the theater, painting or opera. But there is television, video and interactive technology, the new media, if you will. I'd like to have that sit under the broader umbrella of what art is."

Davidson said he does not recall much of what he watched on television as a child in the Inland Empire city of Ontario, but he has long loved creating entertaining and educational programs for children. Although he has tried his hand at other types of programming, children's material has always been his main focus, and children have been his best audiences.

"I really enjoy the way children look at the world," he said. "It is probably the most honest audience you can possibly have. They don't need to be polite at their age."



TYRONE TURNER / Los Angeles Times

Patrick Davidson, left, executive producer of "Disney's Sing Me a Story With Belle," confers with the show's director, Steve Purcell.

Davidson spends much of his time at a North Hollywood studio overseeing a half-hour show about a fairy-tale heroine who finds her greatest inspiration in books and music. The live-action syndicated show, "Disney's Sing Me a Story With Belle," is based on the "Beauty and the Beast" character and takes up where the animated film left off.

After Belle marries the prince, she buys the village bookstore and creates a place where children can gather to read and play music. Combining old Disney animated shorts with new songs, the characters sing their way through two stories designed to teach children moral lessons.

Ironically, Davidson said he and his wife, Roberta, rarely let their own daughters watch television, but instead encourage them to read books and play sports.

"I especially don't like them to watch MTV," he said. "I don't like the demeaning way women are portrayed, the violence. Generally, we try to agree on what to watch on TV and what movies to watch."

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'Let's add a little magic to the holidays,' he said. 'The Islands?' you asked. 'close,' he mused, 'but even more charming. Flowers everywhere. Majestic palms. We'll stay in a European manor house, in a gracious, comfortable room. There's even a tiled indoor pool. You'll think you're in Europe.' 'But the weather's warm in L.A. What about holiday spirit?' you worry. He smiles. 'We'll have a balcony overlooking the gardens, twinkling

LA Times article on "Sing Me A Story with Belle" executive producer Patrick Davidson - Part 2 (1996)

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